THE

Westminster Play.

With R. Bruce Dickson's
kind regards.

THE

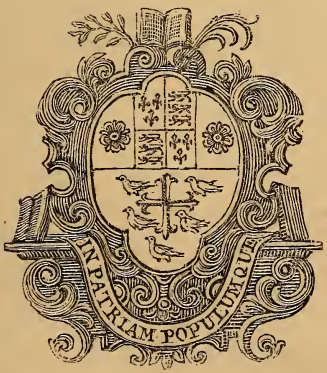
WESTMINSTER PLAY,

ITS ACTORS AND ITS VISITORS.

BY

AN OLD WESTMINSTER.

"The Play 's the thing."—HAMLET.



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INTRODUCTION.

It is not with any idea that I can do justice to my subject, but merely with a desire to add my mite of loving applause to Westminster's glory, that I have been induced, while sitting alone in my room on this night, when all that I have endeavoured to picture in the following pages is going on in reality, to beguile my solitude by looking over and bringing into shape a few ideas which I have, either while at school or since I left, scribbled down in commemoration of the Play—the great era in a Westminster's life.

As it is only for my schoolfellows, past and present, that this trifle is intended, I make no apology for the use of terms which will not be understood except by them; but I must, at the same time, pray *their* forbearance in regard to any errors which may be found in it, hoping they will pardon its numerous defects, in consideration that my difficult but pleasing task has been undertaken through a feeling of love and respect for our Royal School.

I will say no more, but leave my little book to stand or fall, not by its own merits (small were its

chance if I were to do that), but by the degree of mercy afforded to it by all Westminsters, whether young or old, who, whatever may be their opinion with regard to this trifle, will, I am sure, join in the hearty wishes for the prosperity, not only of the Play, but of everything connected with Westminster, which are uttered from the bottom of his heart, by

THE AUTHOR.

December 21st,
1854.

THE

WESTMINSTER PLAY.

"ELECTION, 'lection, 'lection. Hot water."

"Where are my boots?"

"Mother Knight come yet?"

"By Jingo, I've not got a clean shirt; here's a go: just lend me one, there's a good fellow."

"Clock?"

"Fourteen minutes and a half to six."

"Here, Election, Brown wants a junior to take him up his surplice."

"Anyone seen my tail coat?"

"I've lost my sandals: some one's taken one of them and left me a half Wellington instead."

"Seen Demipho?"

"I left him struggling into his fleshings; they were rather too small for him last year, and have shrunk in the washing since."

"We shall be awfully late."

Such is a specimen of the conversation within

College Walls on a play night; but the scene, who shall describe? Figures in surplices (and nothing else) looking like Chelsea ghosts on an extensive scale; others rushing frantically about in search of some defaulting pair of trowsers, or shirt of peculiar beauty, which has mysteriously levanted; Juniors in every degree of heat, Seniors in every degree of excitement, Third Election and Second Election in the stiffest possible white ties and the glossiest possible black trowsers, the Captain ruefully contemplating the knee breeches in which it is his "painful duty" to encase himself, and vainly trying to look as if he had been accustomed to buckles all his life; Stoker and his assistants giving an extra hammer at the green baize, the Gasman attempting to get the lights into order so as to avoid the violent crack which invariably takes place in the most pathetic scenes, as if the lamp-glasses were overcome by their feelings; add to this, College John wandering about as if he were making himself generally useful, which he is not, and an occasional glimpse of the Under Master with some final instructions for the Captain, and farewell hints about the Epilogue,—and you will have some faint idea of the confusion worse confounded which heralds in a second night performance.

But at length Demipho has accomplished the more than herculean feat of compressing the largest possible of legs into the smallest possible of fleshings, the last of the surplices has disappeared to the

Head Master's, and a last brush has been given to the hair, and a last look has been taken at the tie, and Under Elections walk up and down college with their caps on, and fancy they are Seniors.

A rushing noise is heard, as of a party of inebriated whirlwinds coming up College, and the Dî Superi (in vulgar parlance, the Gods) make their appearance. Now is the time to see the God-keeper in his glory, in kid-gloves, cane, and commanding voice; "Here, Jones, go up closer. Room for three or four more in that corner—tumble up Davis." Now small boys who have never before been in such an exalted position, get into a tremendous state of mind, and fail lamentably in their attempt to look as if they were enjoying themselves; now mightily triumphant look those lucky dogs, who, through the favour of some monitor, have obtained the doubtful privilege of sitting on a couple of inches of window-ledge, with their legs dangling down as if on the verge of dissolving partnership with the bodies to which they belong, and setting up on their own account in the ladies' pit.

Time wears on; the Gods are all settled comfortably, (?) being packed as close as bullocks at Smithfield once were, and as third-class passengers still are when *en route* for Hampton Court on Easter Monday. For the Gods, be it known, are constructed on the carpet-bag principle—you can always shove in a little more, or, as private school circulars have it,

there are always "one or two vacancies for eligible young gentlemen." The crowd at the door is increasing; the one policeman who guards the portals has great difficulty in keeping order, and still more in keeping his temper; watches are consulted and pronounced slow, and it is with a general sensation of relief and grunt of satisfaction that the opening of the bar is hailed. The policeman is almost swept off his legs, and only preserves his balance by catching hold of little Cowley, the smallest of the Juniors, who happens to be at the bottom of the stairs; by which operation the dignity of both parties is seriously hurt. The policeman grunts out an apology to Cowley, and avenges himself by rushing out and seizing a small sci who is looking on in an innocent manner with his hands in his pockets, and is consequently rather surprised at being violently removed from the yard, well shaken, and told "not to do it again," to the intense delight of two little girls who came out of Black Dog Alley, each with a baby rather bigger than herself in her arms, and her own mouth and the baby's smeared all over with a sticky abomination sold to the deluded juveniles of the neighbourhood under the name of Albert rock.

A flood of tickets is presented at the doors, and the *quondam* proprietors of them hasten down the Dormitory; part turn up to the Dî Superi, others, proud in the possession of the talisman which admits them to the lower part—a Senior's card, make their

way into the body of the house, where they much incommode Perceval (the individual who keeps the Seniors' pit) by a most unsociable habit of scattering themselves all over the place, and resisting all his entreaties to sit close. Mr. Blowten, the eminent city merchant, who has received a ticket from his nephew in the Under School, whom he looks on as a prodigy of learning, "kept down, sir, by a base conspiracy of Masters and boys," resolutely takes up a position in the first row. He is unhappily rather deaf, and in anything but a good temper, having endured for half an hour the weight of a fat gentleman on his pet toe; so he does not receive with equanimity the mild remonstrances of Perceval, who endeavours to explain to him that those places are the Under Master's. At length, however, much to the delight of the unhappy Perceval, he is carried off by a friend to a back row, where they settle quietly down into a discussion about some splendid investment called the Grand Niagara Saw-mills, in which Blowten is a large shareholder, forgetful alike of Terence, Perceval, the Under Master, and the Seniors' pit.

But we are getting on too fast: long before Blowten and Perceval have adjusted their little difference—in fact, while the latter is describing his woes to a sympathising friend, and alluding to Blowten in strong metaphorical language, as "an obstinate old camel,"—the *élite* begin to arrive through the Under Master's door, and first appears

an Old Westminster, and mighty is his indignation, when a heedless Junior demands of him his ticket. "My ticket, sir? look up there, there's my name—Robinson's election—two-and-twenty years running have I been to the Play, and never before was I asked for my ticket." The Junior feels inclined to collapse into his boots, and cowers before his just indignation, which is not appeased till a cry of "Acworth, old fellow, how are you?" sounds in his ear, and his hand is grasped by the very Robinson who, two-and-twenty years ago, was Captain of his election. What wrath could withstand the influence of such a meeting? Acworth smiles blandly, and the Junior feels he is forgiven.

But see, a white evening dress flutters in the distance. Hoskins, who keeps the ladies' pit (lucky fellow), feels so nervous, that he tries to pull on his tight kid gloves still tighter, so that they go in two different places; in which misfortune he is by no means without companions, it being a statistical fact, that out of every ten pair of gloves, four are torn in being put on, two go before the play begins, three at different intervals during the evening, and only one returns in safety to the owner's bureaux, whence it emerges for a dinner at the Sub Dean's the next half.

However, as Hoskins declares, "he wouldn't mind his gloves if the ladies would only sit in their proper places;" but after some frantic attempts

to keep three places which the Captain sat up till twelve on the preceding night to *tibi*, he is entirely defeated by a stout lady and two daughters, who take possession of them by force, and turn a deaf ear to all his complaints; so he gives up the task in despair, communicating to Cowley the fact that "he knows there'll be a row among the ladies before long, he's done all he could to prevent it, but it was no earthly use;" which ungallant prophecy is, however, not fulfilled, as they all manage, some how or another, to shake down good-humouredly, and the indignant Hoskins returns with pleasure to his duties.

More Old Westminsters of various standing, some of the Under Master's friends, etc., etc., and the pit begins to fill. Perceval begins to feel hot and anxious, —he has not yet quite recovered the effects of his small verbal combat with Blowten, and his powers of arrangement are quite exhausted; so that instead of showing each fresh arrival to his place, he is content to say in an appealing tone of voice, "Oh, will you please get in there, I think you will find room in some of the back rows;" and strange to say, room is found by every fresh comer, after treading on the toes of those who preceded him in a ruthless manner, only found in an omnibus, and the Seniors' pit. Perceval sends word in despair t Fergurson at the King's Bar, not to let any one else in till after the Head Master's partly have arrived,

and Fergurson in the eager discharge of his duty lets the bar fall on the head of a swell in the act of entering, whereupon there ensues a row, which is but the precursor to a series of energetic combats between the bar-keepers and divers individuals outside. Many gorgeously got up, all over studs and buttons, encouraged by the examples of some Old Westminsters, make insane efforts to get over the bar unperceived, and are ignominiously turned back amid the jeers of the bystanders.

The Under Master's friends are safely established in the places vacated by the injured Blowten, the Under Master himself (who deserves the best thanks of every Westminster for the pains he always takes about the Play, and his anxiety for its success) has passed twenty-seven times between his house and the theatre, and had thirteen private interviews with the Captain, who, as time wears on, begins to feel a little nervous: and now, at about five minutes to seven, the Gods go off into a succession of claps, the young Old Westminsters stand up, and everybody in the house imitates their example to welcome Mrs. Headmaster, who appears leaning on the arm of the Captain, who for this minute or two looks as happy as any one in knee breeches and buckles can be expected to look. This is a most artfully-devised plan to raise the ambition of small town boys, who always on play nights wish from the very bottom of their hearts that they may some day, as Captains,

enjoy the privilege of escorting in Mrs. Headmaster, and even little Phillips, Blowten's nephew, determines "he will begin to muzz next half like bricks."

Five minutes more, and the house again rise, and again the Gods clap, and the band strikes up "See the Conquering Hero comes;" and presently the conquering hero appears in the shape of the Head Master and his party, though what connection of ideas associates those gentlemen, mostly in grey heads and expansive waistcoats, with conquering heroes or Judas Maccabæus, no one, as far as my knowledge goes, has as yet discovered.

At last all the grey heads and expansive waistcoats have settled down; that portion of the audience which for the last half hour have been enjoying a view of college and the back of the Gods from the King's Bar are at length admitted; and find their way to different parts of the house; the buzz of conversation becomes general; the expansive waistcoats indulge in anecdotes of their younger and slimmer days; the ladies take mental notes of each other's dresses; and the young Old Westminsters try to make out whose face is peering through that hole in the curtain, or indulge in conjectures on the subject of the Epilogue, and nobody listens to the overture; but when that is at an end, everything is hushed, and everybody is on the *qui vive* for the Prologue.

See, with a couple of agitated bows on each side

and one in the centre, the Captain appears, looking nervously round; however, a long clap restores his courage a little, and he begins clearly and distinctly, though with a slight tremble in his voice; unwilling to meet anybody's eye, he fixes his gaze on the red head of a little town boy who is keeping one of the reporters' places, and thus abstracted from all outward considerations gets on "no end of well." In the first three or four lines there is nothing remarkable, but then there occurs a neat tribute to the memory of some one who has died during the preceding year, and then the young Old Westminsters, resplendent in white ties, kid-gloves, and opera hats, make up for their self-restraint during the previous lines by an uproarious burst of applause, and the Captain is still more delighted by hearing a bald-headed gentleman in the front row say, "Very good indeed, capital emphasis." Encouraged by this he becomes still more eloquent; he forgets that he is not in his native and every-day trowsers; he gives all the points well, and they are well taken; so that his bow on leaving the stage is as bold and satisfied as it was tremulous and nervous on entering. Before the claps attending his exit have died away, he has been patted on the back by everybody behind the scenes, and has come to the conclusion that "speaking the Prologue is not so very awful after all;" and then away he rushes to the single-bedded room in the sanatorium which he has engaged to dress in weeks before.

Happy fellow! he may be Lord Chancellor, Commander-in-Chief, President of the Royal Academy, Manager of Drury-Lane, or Archbishop of Canterbury, but I doubt if he will ever feel more proud and happy than he does to-night. Many a year to come, when he is grey and old, and little future Captains are playing round grandpapa's knee, will he remember, with thoughts of pleasure and delight, his "blaze of triumph" in the Prologue.

Meanwhile, on the stage Geta is walking up and down in a state of great excitement, frantically trying to go over every scene of his part in eight minutes, and thereby considerably harassing the unlucky junior promptor as well as himself; he finally settles down into a state of utter despair about the first scene with Davus and the pathetic speech, which, to use his own words, "is not at all in his line." Davus, on the other hand, is calm and resigned, till just before the bell rings he finds he has forgotten the property purse he had to give to Geta. This is terrible: everybody being in their best things have of course left their purses in their other pocket. However after a long search the prompter produces from the recesses of his college waistcoat a halfpenny; armed with this, and fortified by two jellies and a glass of sack whey to clear his voice, Davus makes a bolt and finds himself, he never can tell how, after a few agitating moments, in the middle of the stage and his soliloquy. He is enthusiastically received, especially

by Blowten, who, as Perceval sarcastically remarks, "considers his red wig the height of light comedy." In fact, so highly gratified is the former respectable gentleman, that between the acts he condescends to make advances towards a reconciliation by asking "who the funny red-haired chap was, and when he was coming on again?" Perceval, who is really a good-natured fellow, and bears no malice, undertakes to describe all the actors for him, and as far as possible to make him understand the plot, in which latter attempt he signally fails, Mr. B. returning home with a faint idea that Phormio married Nausistrata, receiving the blessing of Antipho, and kindly adopting Geta, the son of Demipho and nephew of Phædria; and then there's something about Chremes, only he does not quite understand that.

There is little need to describe the progress of the play; there is the same impossible mountain with a temple perched on the top of it, there are the same seedy deities outside the same houses of the Harley-street cut, which every frequenter of the Play has known from his boyhood as constituting the street of Athens, in which the action of the drama takes place. Would it be impossible amongst Westminsters past and present, to raise a sufficient sum to pay for a new scene more in accordance with the beauty of the dresses, which, thanks to Mrs. Headmaster, improve in grace and elegance year by year? I hope not; and when any public-spirited individual

will start a subscription for that purpose, I for one will be most ready to contribute.

The representatives of the young men find the same difficulty in disposing of their arms which they always have found; the representatives of the young ladies look as nice, and walk as peculiarly, as they always have done; there is the same good acting but the same want of by-play, the same beaming expression of delight on the countenances of the Old Westminsters, the same enthusiastic reception among the Gods of any passages which occur in the Latin grammar, the same violent applause on the part of the young Old Westminsters. Let us imagine then that Geta has got safely through his pathetic parts, and that all the other characters have acquitted themselves *au merveille*, and that Phormio's appeal "*vos valete et plaudete*" has been well responded to. Then while the characters in the Epilogue are changing their dresses, and those who are not are wishing that they were; while unmistakable sounds behind the curtain indicate that the brilliant polka the band is playing,—which would be perfect had not the cornet rather over-indulged himself,—has not been without its effect on the saltatory powers of the actors; let us mingle with the audience, and find out anybody interesting among them to while away the time.

Place aux dames, cast your eyes on the domain of Hoskins, who is in a state of great felicity, having got through the evening remarkably well, with the

slight drawback of dropping a jelly and a glass of wine on the black velvet dress of a respectable old lady. See those two little beauties who have got hold of a Coleman, and keep reading it, though they every now and then say something about its being shocking. Look at the conscious pride of the tall lady next them, who yet retains some relics of her ancient beauty: she has had four sons at Westminster, one of whom acts Phormio to-night; it is with no small sentiment of gratification that, when the play is over, she will walk down the old Dormitory leaning on her son's arm, and listening with not unbecoming pride to the repeated praises and congratulations of all they meet. It must be a happy moment both for mother and son, also for that little man in spectacles who is the father of the family; but he will linger behind to catch up chance words of praise, not intended for the performer's ear, and all the more sweet to hear on that account. All the way home to Russell Square in their brougham, father and mother will keep up one continued chorus of praise, on a subject of which they can never get tired, and on which, husband and wife though they be, they perfectly agree. Next sits the stout old lady, whose black satin fell a victim to Hoskins's jelly; but she has very good-naturedly forgiven the little *contre-temps*, and in fact to hear her answer to the profuse apologies he endeavours to make, one would fancy that her dress had been rather improved than other-

wise by it. She is now bending forward to make her annual speech to one of the Masters, to the effect that she looks on herself as an Old Westminster—she has been to the Play so often, and that this is without exception the very best she has ever seen; in reply to which, the Master bows, and says it is very kind of her to say so, and that he is very glad she has been so well pleased. This is an annual ceremony which has taken place every Play this forty years, so that, if the old lady be a competent critic, the Plays must have been very, very bad in her youth, and gradually improved, or must by this time have arrived at a preternatural degree of excellence. Look at the little girl in long curls; that is Demipho's pet sister, and he points her out with much exultation of spirit to Geta, Phormio, both prompters, and in fact any one he can come across, from Mrs. Goolden downwards, and is much delighted by the satisfactory judgment they all pass on her, she being pronounced "a trump," "an out-and-outer," "a regular stunner," "no end of a bird" by the gentlemen, and "a perfect little darling" by Mrs. G. The young lady in question, after her admiration of Demipho's beard has subsided, is highly delighted by catching sight of her younger brother up in the Gods, whom she looks on as in a most enviable position, and in fact she "cannot make out why Ma won't let her go up there, it must be so much more jolly."

But we must leave the ladies to the care of Hos-

kins (who has managed to ingratiate himself immensely with them, and who for the first week of the holidays will dream every evening of a certain pair of blue eyes and a pink dress which sat near the door), while we turn to the other portion of the audience.

Have you noticed that clerical gentleman in the spotless shirt front, with the sleek-looking forehead and two carefully-cherished curls hardly worth the labour bestowed upon them? That is the Rev. Silas Witherington, the celebrated clergyman of Clapham: he would not be seen at an English theatre for the richest living patron could bestow; but there he sits enjoying the Play as much as, perhaps more than, anybody else; and next to him, in no shirt front at all, inasmuch as he wears a M. B. waistcoat, is the Rev. St. George Fitzgerald, whom Witherington looks on as little better than a Romanist, because he observes Saints' days, and has a painted window in his church. See, however, here they meet on neutral ground, their thoughts go back far beyond the Gorham controversy, to the day when they had that memorable fight of two hours and a quarter directly after abbey. Here they sit, Witherington beaming on Fitzgerald in total oblivion of a painted window representing St. Martin dividing his cloak with the beggar, Fitzgerald smiling blandly on Witherington, as if "The Record" had no existence, or had never contained a series of stinging articles, containing an

ingenious parallel between Nebuchadnezzar and the Rev. St. G——e F——d, signed, Anti-Inquisition, but popularly attributed to the Rev. Silas. Look at them, ye opponents of the Westminster Play, you critic of the Daily News, see these two, for one night at least renewing the friendship of youth, and forgetting all their differences in common delights and pleasing recollections. Had you succeeded in your endeavours to stop the Play, never would they have met in this friendly spirit, but now they will share the same cab home, and the only dispute they will have this night will be who shall go out of his way to set the other down.

Pass on to that other clerical-looking gentleman who is sitting not far from them; who do you think he is? Some dignitary of the church. I knew you thought so, but I can let you into a secret: he is Merrington's butler, who has "come to see master John act." You wonder doubtless how he got there; but the fact is, that he so imposed upon College John and Perceval by the general ecclesiastical appearance of his dress, that he has been confortably located close to the Masters in as good a place as any in the house. He is no scholar, but deems it right to clap master John as a duty to the family, "with whom he has lived 37 years come next February—12 as footman and 25 as butler," as he informs Mr. Slowcoach, one of the Oxford tutors, who is sitting next to him, much to the astonishment of the said Slow-

coach, who laboured under the same delusion as you and Perceval did with regard to him; he is, therefore, very enthusiastic and not very discriminating, applauding whenever that gentleman opens his mouth, and hereby gets up several claps for him at uncalled-for places; which whole proceeding, though very gratifying, appears rather mysterious to the astonished Merrington.

I want you to observe an old gentleman in the second row of the gallery: he has remained immovable during the pathos of Geta, and the humour of Phormio; but no sooner did the lawyers appear on the scene, than his face brightened, he leaned forward on his umbrella, and when Crito had delivered the one speech belonging to his very arduous character, (in which, bye the bye, the said Crito very nearly broke down under the combined influences of terror and sack whey), he could contain himself no longer, and looking round with an air of triumph exclaimed, "My son, sir." That old gentleman has come up 170 miles to see the Westminster Play, he tells his neighbours, but in reality to hear that one speech; he has heard it, and he is satisfied: what is it to him if Phormio outwits Demipho, or Demipho frustrates his benevolent intentions? He has seen his son act, that is sufficient: he feeds on the recollection during all the remainder of the Play, and he will go back his 170 miles with a full conviction that he has enjoyed the performance very much. Between the acts he

asks little Marsden, who is keeping a reporter's place near him, to construe the speech, not that he is ignorant of its meaning—he has too often said it over, and looked it out in Coleman, and talked it over with little Mr. Wigsly, the curate of his parish (who has found a sure way to his patron's heart and dinner-table, by asking how the Play is getting on, and whether young Mr. Bowie is up in his part),—he has done all this, I say, too often to feel the least doubt on the subject; still he asks Marsden to construe it, because he likes still to speak of it, to hear of it, and to think of it. Little Marsden accordingly does so, as it luckily happens not to be a very difficult passage, and, moreover wins upon Bowie Sen.'s heart by telling him what a regular brick young Bowie is, and how kind he has been to him, and how he has promised to help him into college next year; which affecting tribute to his son's virtues draws a tear from the eye and a sovereign from the pocket of the elder Bowie, the former of which finds its way to a large blue pocket handkerchief with white spots, the latter to the trowsers' pocket of the astonished Marsden, and thence, I may remark, to Suttcliff's till. Overwhelmed by this unexpected liberality, little Marsden immediately comes to the conclusion, as he informs his bosom friend Sinclair next morning in the intervals of a particularly hard epigram, "that the governor is as great a trump as young Bowie."

Not far from the last-mentioned, sits another old gentleman, whom you may recognise by that peculiarly uncomfortable expression of countenance, which people put on when they wish to delude themselves and their neighbours into the idea, that they are perfectly at their ease, and do not fancy anybody is looking at them. He is Geta's father, and imagines that every one present is aware of the fact, and looking on him accordingly. He does not, therefore, think it proper to applaud his own son for fear it should be considered as parental partiality. And yet, wrapped up as he is in Geta's performance, he considers Bowie to be making himself ridiculous by his unfeigned expressions of delight at Crito: thus it is in life—we all have our monomanias, and those who are more dignifiedly mad look down with contempt on their neighbours, whose mania is more trifling than their own. The fathers of most of the other actors are here to-night, but I need not point them out to you, they can easily be discovered by their bland expression of countenance, and the wonderful degree of interest they take in their respective sons: let us pass on then to the Old Westminsters. See that fine-looking man in a bishop's apron next to the Head Master. It is his last visit to the Play for many a long year, perhaps for ever; he sails next month for his diocese in Australia: many a time when far away will his thoughts travel back to his old friends, and his

old haunts; and among the pleasant recollections of his native land which will come crowding thick upon him, especially at this merry Christmas-tide, Westminster and the Wesminster Play will doubtless hold their place. But it is not on this evening that he looks forward to his lonely future, and his solitary wanderings in a distant land; he is wrapped up in the Play, and his recollection flies backward o'er the intervening years so long to pass through, so short to look back upon, to the time when he acted Geta in a footman's livery of the period; and General O'Blazes, who is sitting next to him, was Nausistrata. Many another Geta and Nausistrata have trodden the Westminster boards since then, and the General who made a very good-looking lady in his time, is now six foot two, with large bushy whiskers, which have been black, but already show

"The touch of Time's destroying fingers:"

he has also got two medals, not to mention three real lady representatives of the line of O'Blazes, to whom Hoskins is making himself vastly agreeable in the ladies' pit, one of them being the possessor of the blue eyes and pink dress before alluded to.

It is, in truth, hard to believe that these old, grey-headed men, soldiers and politicians, poets and divines, who meet here once a year in no spirit of formality or imperious sense of duty, but in real

hearty cheerfulness, have in their time figured on this stage as laughing girls, or knavish slaves, or fashionable young Athenians. Who would fancy that Rivers, with his pale, meek countenance, the gentlest of clergymen, who, free from sectarian spirit, loves better to do his own duty calmly and peacefully, loving and beloved by all around him, than to publish to the world as heretics and idolaters all those whose opinions do not quite coincide with his own —who would believe that this gentle, little man blustered through Thraso with applause never before or since exceeded? Or who, again, would recognise in that pinched and meagre form, bent down by the weight of age, which can scarcely totter to its chair without the aid of the arm which the Head Master so gently proffers, the most sprightly of Phormios and most pleasing of Phædrias? Yes, Time is ever at its work. Those who acted here have since played their parts, and many of them important ones, in the real drama of life; and each year as it speeds by witnesses more entrances on the stage to fill the place of those whose last speech is spoken, whose last exit is made, on whom death has let fall its curtain.

But these are not the thoughts which fill the mind of yonder M. P. and his two friends. He has stolen this evening from his well-beloved Blue Books (very different from those he knew by that name when at Westminster), though he has refused

countless invitations to dinner, because he was so busy getting up the facts with regard to the unconstitutional behaviour of the beadle of Bubbleton-cum-Squeak, in reference to two little boys whom he found playing marbles on the church steps. He intends to ask the Home Secretary what steps the Government intended taking in the matter; and if the answer is unsatisfactory, to ask leave to bring in a bill for the better regulation of beadles in the United Kingdom. But even with this important business weighing heavily on his brain, with all his anxiety to get up a good case in favour of his bill, he has been unable to resist the temptation of giving up this evening to the Play, and there he sits with his two friends, one of whom is looking forward to the next vacant judgeship, and the other is a writer of heavy political articles, full of facts and statistics, in one of the reviews, which would be very convincing if we could catch any glimpse of their meaning, and form any idea of what they were intended to prove. These three are engaged in active discussion. On what? The law of beadles, the Irish church, or some such subject of national interest? No—but whether the present bishop of Bullocksmithy was a Senior or a Third Election when he thrashed those two cads up by the Old Swan. Beadles, statistics, judgeships, have vanished from their thoughts; their countenances appear less care-worn, their very voices less harsh and business-like, as at

the mention of some well-known name the visions of their school days rise before them. Some of the very ministers whom our M. P. is ready to impeach present themselves to his imagination, not as traitors and tyrants, but as boys whose verses he has done, or whose fathers have had him out on Saturday and Sunday.

But pleasant as it is to come back to these scenes, yet it is not always unmixed joy that we feel; it is impossible to reckon up our school friends without finding some blanks. Listen to those two who are standing up in front of Fitzgerald; they have not met since they left, and now are hastily running through the catalogue of those who read the same books, sat at the same tables, and acted in the same play that they did. One is dead, at the University, at the opening of what promised to be a glorious career; he died, and with him fell many a bright hope, many a cherished expectation of credit to be won for the dear old place at Westminster. Another fell bravely in his country's cause, in one of the great Indian battles. A third wore out his life in silent grief and agony in a foreign land; and even of those whom death has spared, how many have their hopes crushed and their prospects blighted! And yet these are not old men to whom we are listening. Turn we to that bent form of whom I spake, and we shall hear a yet sadder tale. Hear what he is saying to the middle-aged gentleman with

bald head and grizzled whiskers, who seems on friendly terms with all the audience, and has a kind word and a pleasant look for everybody, from the old man with whom he is now speaking, to the youngest of the young Old Westminsters.

"Yes, all my Election are gone, except myself, and I shall follow them soon,—this is the last play I shall ever see."

Mournful words enough are these, and for a moment a cloud steals over the good-humoured face of his companion, who, to use his own words, looks on himself as a link between the Masters and the boys, and to whose unvarying kindness towards me I gladly pay this humble tribute. Even he cannot help recalling the generations he has seen spring up and pass away since first—— But in good time to dissipate all these melancholy reflections, the band arrives at the end of a seemingly interminable set of waltzes, and up goes the curtain for the Epilogue.

* * * * *

And now suppose the usual number of allusions have been made, and that the old gentlemen have all gone off into the usual excited state of uproarious mirth, produced among them by the comprehension of a Latin joke (for their enjoyment of it is considerably heightened by finding they have not so utterly lost all their classical knowledge as to be unable to construe it); and suppose the worthy

canon in the fifth row has understood every word, and translated all the more abstruse jokes aloud for the benefit of the surrounding company; and that Demipho has wound up with a very neat and appropriate tag of about 20 lines, so admirably and feelingly delivered that a very close observer might have seen something very suspiciously like a tear standing in the eyes of sundry of the expansive waistcoats; and that he has made his bow, and the other characters in the Epilogue have made their bows, very gracefully, with the exception of Chremes, whose wig came off; and that the curtain has fallen;—suppose all this, I say, to have taken place,—you must, indeed, be of a very phlegmatic temper if you do not join in the thunders of applause which echo from the Gods above, and the old gentlemen below. All vie with one another in their energy: even the ladies join, and amidst a perfect hurricane of approbation the curtain rises once more, and all the characters appear, in a tableau which has been so well arranged by the taste of Mrs. Headmaster, that every one in the house is delighted with it, save and except Bowie, who thinks Crito should have been in the middle.

A shout of "Cap! cap!" arises, and all available trenchers having been pressed into the service, the Captain distributes them among the Old Westminster portion of the audience who present substantial proofs of their satisfaction. There is another immense clap (the band keeps up a running fire of

"God save the Queen" during all these proceedings), in the midst of which the Head Master and his party pass out; then the young Old Westminsters carry the stage by storm, and shake hands frantically with all the performers. Audience and actors now mingle one with another, and every one is busy giving or receiving congratulations, especially Phormio, who rather likes it at first, but is very much bored by individuals who knew his great grandfather at Timbuctoo, or his aunt's second cousin out at Jericho, or some other equally interesting relative of his, and presume on that friendship to shake hands with him, and offer their sincere congratulations; also to introduce their friend Mr. Jones, who is excessively anxious to have that pleasure, and has been excessively delighted by his admirable impersonation of the character. This is all very well for the first two or three times, but after that Phormio gets very tired of saying "Oh, indeed!" which is the only answer he can make to these polite speeches, as he is not sufficiently acquainted with the facts of the case either to confirm or deny the assertion with regard to his relative. Demipho is much depressed by being told by two young ladies of his acquaintance, to whom he has given tickets, in hopes of producing a favourable impression on them, that he looks like an old guy; while Antipho is proportionately delighted at hearing one very pretty girl (at least he calls her so, but perhaps he may have

been prejudiced) exclaim to her next neighbour, "What a duck that was in the yellow shawl kind of thing!"

Every one is expressing an opinion that the Play is most excellent, with the exception of some very old Westminsters, who always will compare it with some performance of extraordinary merit which never had any existence except in their imaginations, and pronounce it inferior to some plays they recollect when young; except also some very young Old Westminsters, who deem it necessary to keep up their reputations as critics by finding out every trifling fault which may exist in the performance, which, together with a great many that do not exist, they commit to paper and send anonymously next day to the actors, who profess themselves very grateful indeed, but in their heart of hearts look on it as a captious and uncalled-for lecture, which might have been very well dispensed with. Now also do the young Old Westminsters, and all such as manage to get hold of a friend to take them behind the scenes, indulge largely in sack whey, which the fat alderman yonder seems to consider the best part of the performance; sundry glasses, too, of this exquisite compound are conveyed to the ladies, who "only want a little, just to taste," but find that taste so satisfactory that they finish their glass.

But we must loiter here no longer; every one is going—some to the Head Master's, others to one of

the boarding-houses, and a few young Old Westminsters, by special invitation, to sup with the actors. How jolly every one looks, and no wonder—all has gone off so well; was there ever a Westminster Play which did not? And so we make for the door, and there we meet the Colonial bishop as he turns round to take a last look at the Dormitory, lingering behind every one else, as if loth to quit. Hear what he says —with no more fitting words can I conclude my subject: "Well it 's a dear old place—as College John used to say when I was here,

"'Gentlemen, here 's Floreat.'"

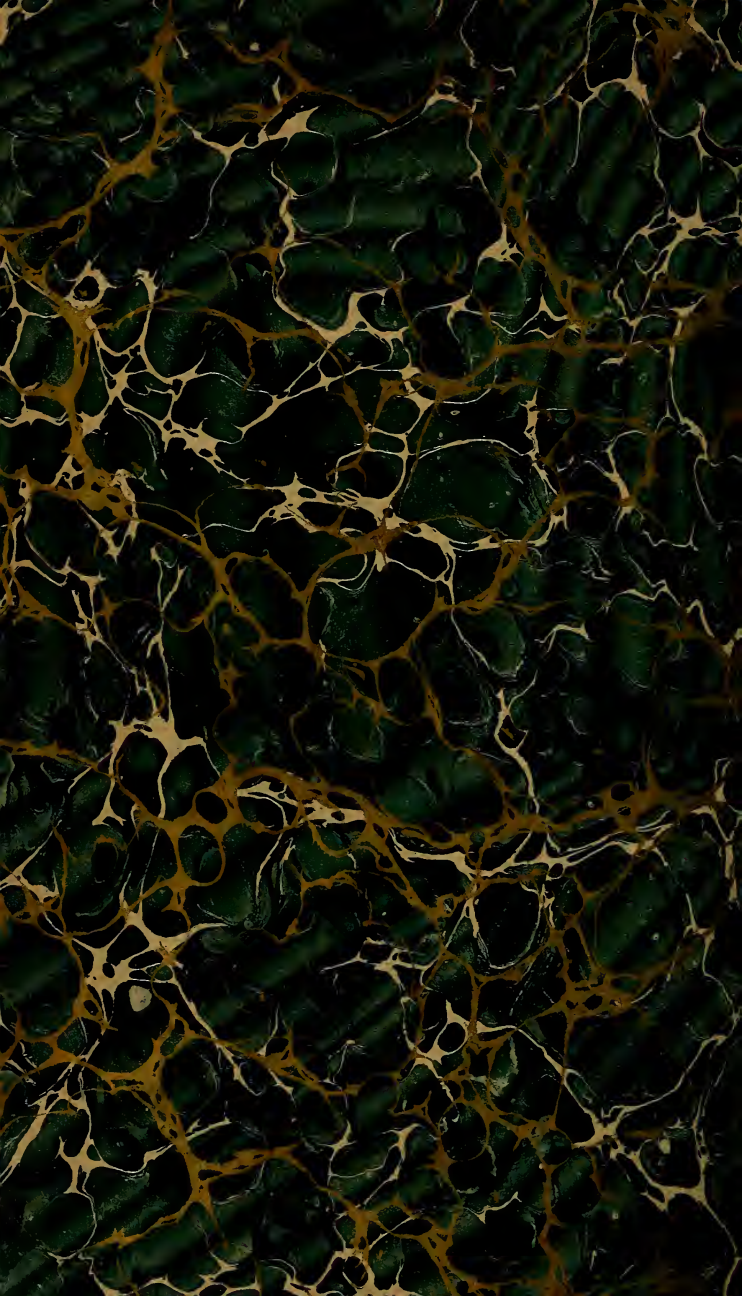
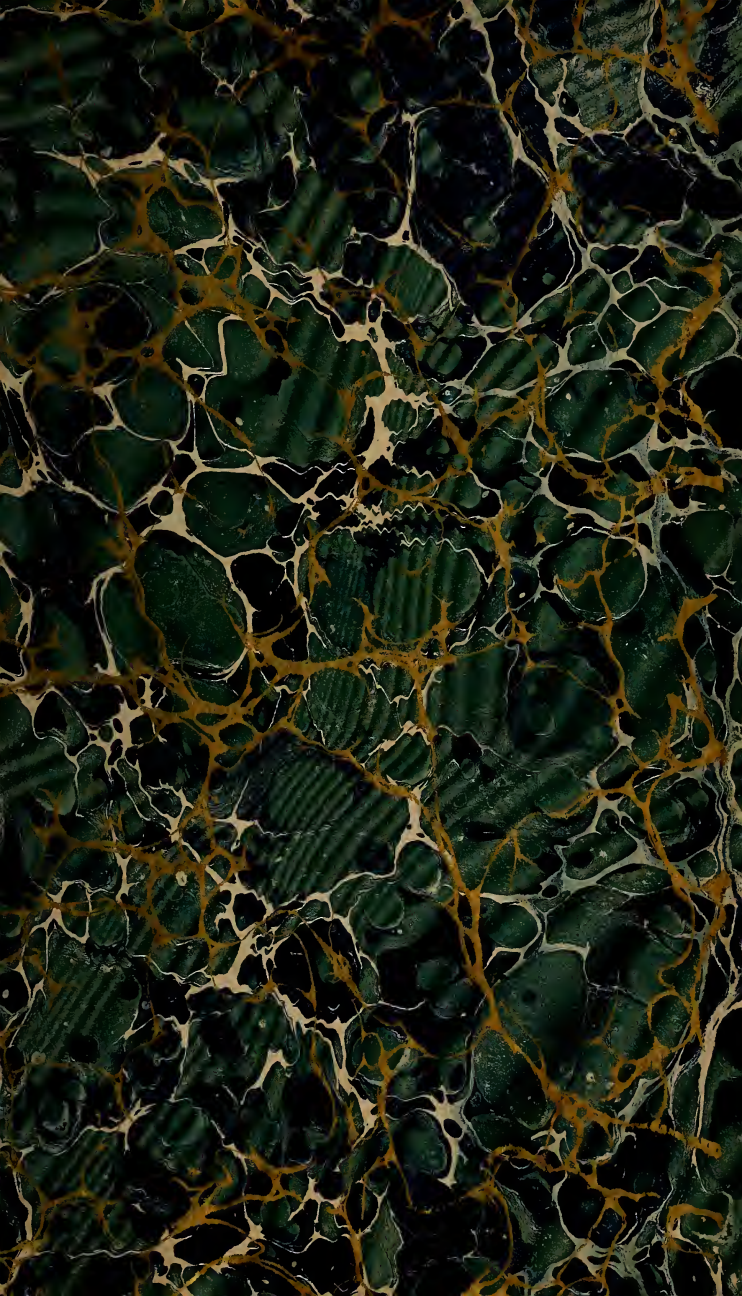
L' ENVOI.

If we shadows have offended,
The least said the soonest mended.

My task is accomplished, the visions which with a wave of my pen I have summoned up before me, have vanished again into thin air, and I am alone once more. Nothing then remains but to launch them on the world and hope the best. But one thing would I say to the reader who has accompanied me thus far: fancy not that you or any of your friends are shown up in the preceding pages: with hardly an exception, my characters are intended as general types not as particular individuals; if then you find, or fancy you find, any resemblance which hurts your feelings, or wounds your pride, be well assured it is perfectly unintentional. If this trifle should succeed in recalling to any Old Westminster who is unable to be present at the Play, some of his own recollections, if it give pleasure to any present Westminster as a humble attempt to pourtray some of the characteristics of our annual festival, then I shall not repent of having braved the contempt of some, and the severe

but perhaps well-merited criticism of others, by publishing this record of the mingled fancies and recollections which crowd around me at the mention of

"The Westminster Play."

THE END.

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